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NEWS RELEASE

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Paul J. McNulty, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia announced today the break up of a major gun trafficking ring in Hampton Roads. He also announced that 26 individuals have been charged in connection with illegal trafficking in firearms. Mr. McNulty was joined in this announcement by Jeff Roehm, Special Agent in Charge of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; Ray Kelly, Commissioner of the New York City Police Department; and Dennis Mook, Chief of the Newport News Police Department.

On January 9, 2003, a federal grand jury in Newport News, Virginia returned an indictment charging 25 individuals with conspiracy to make false statements to purchase firearms and making materially false statements to federally licensed firearms dealers to purchase a firearm. The indictment was unsealed in U.S. District Court in Norfolk yesterday, after an early morning team of law enforcement officers from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), Newport News Police Department, and members of the ATF Firearms Task Force (which is comprised of agents and officers from ATF, Newport News, Hampton, Norfolk, Virginia Beach, and Portsmouth Police Departments and the Virginia State Police), began serving arrest warrants on those charged in the indictment. Another individual was charged in a criminal complaint with the same offenses.

The penalty for the conspiracy offense is a maximum term of imprisonment of 5 years. The penalty for the remaining substantive offenses is a maximum term of imprisonment for 10 years. All offenses each carry maximum fines of \$250,000, and no more than 3 years supervised release.

Those charged in the indictment include:

- (1) Harold Adams, age 24, of Newport News, Virginia;
- (2) Tia Terence Allen, age 29, of Newport News, Virginia;
- (3) Sheniqua Yolanda Carpenter, age 26, of Hampton, Virginia;
- (4) Sherri Hunter Christian, age 29, of Hampton, Virginia;
- (5) James Howard Davis, age 26, of Hampton, Virginia;
- (6) Veronica Davis, age 23, of Newport News, Virginia;
- (7) Tara Marie Delk, age 37, of Hampton, Virginia;

- (8) Steven Jarreau Freeman, age 24, of Newport News, Virginia;
- (9) Michelle Jerusha Givens, age 27, of Hampton, Virginia;
- (10) Maurice Hixon Jackson, age 32, of Hampton, Virginia;
- (11) Zelita Shawte Jones, age 22, of Charlottesville, Virginia;
- (12) Sherese Renee Mann, age 27, of Newport News, Virginia;
- (13) Robert S. Morton, age 26, of Carrollton, Virginia;
- (14) Reshida Yvonne Nichols, age 29, of Hampton, Virginia;
- (15) Adrienne Joy Owen, age 22, of Hampton, Virginia;
- (16) Nina Simone Pardner, age 26, of Hampton, Virginia;
- (17) Anthony Darnell Parker, age 38, of Newport News, Virginia;
- (18) Keisha Denise Powell, age 37, of Newport News, Virginia;
- (19) Robert Scott Priest, age 31, of Hampton, Virginia;
- (20) Anthony Brian Scott, age 23, of Hampton, Virginia ;
- (21) Latoye Manley Smith, age 26, of Newport News, Virginia;
- (22) Kecia Lynnett Taliaferro, age 37, of Carrollton, Virginia;
- (23) Shanika Marie Watson, age 23, of Newport News, Virginia;
- (24) Eva Diana Weaver, age 27, of Hampton, Virginia; and
- (25) Lakeisha Lavon Wynne, age 24, of Newport News, Virginia.

Another straw purchaser for this organization, Chesia Conner, age 22, of Newport News, Virginia, was charged yesterday in a separate criminal complaint. Two others, Michelle D. Jones, age 37, of Hampton, Virginia and Elresa A. Burns, age 25, of Newport News, Virginia have previously pleaded guilty to similar charges.

The illegal activity began in 1999 when conspirators began straw purchasing firearms from gun stores located in the Peninsula area of Hampton Roads. Beginning in March 2000, firearms purchased in the Hampton Roads area and utilized in the commission of crimes were being recovered in Baltimore, Maryland, and elsewhere. In 2001, undercover officers from the New York City Police Department (NYPD) began purchasing firearms off the street that were illegally trafficked from the Peninsula area of Hampton Roads. By August 2001, NYPD officers had purchased 107 illegal firearms in a sting operation at a cost of more than \$80,000.

The indictment covers the illegal activities of the defendants and co-conspirators and details the ways, manners, and means to achieve the ends of the conspiracy. The defendants are alleged to have conspired to make money through the trafficking of firearms purchased in the Peninsula area of Hampton Roads, Virginia, and selling the firearms on the streets of New York City, Syracuse, New York, and Baltimore, Maryland. As a part of the conspiracy, the defendants and unindicted co-conspirators would and did play different roles in the conspiracy, taking upon themselves different tasks. Some of the roles assumed and carried out included, financier, organizer, distributor, straw purchaser, transporter of firearms, recruiter of nominees, provider of firearms, and facilitator.

The indictment further alleges that the conspirators recruited the defendants and others to purchase firearms from federally licensed firearms dealers in their true names, then transferred

them to the co-conspirators for sale in other states.

Through the ATF National Tracing Center, and ATF New York and Washington Regional Crime Gun Centers, the firearms were traced back to gun dealers in the Peninsula area of Hampton Roads. Subsequently, the Norfolk ATF Firearms Task Force launched an investigation into the individuals responsible for straw purchasing the firearms, and the base level of the trafficking ring was dismantled. This investigation revealed over 150 firearms were purchased in the Peninsula area of Hampton Roads for further transportation and distribution to New York City, Baltimore, Maryland, and Syracuse, New York.

U.S. Attorney Paul J. McNulty stated: “By circumventing the law, straw purchasers put thousands of guns on our streets, thwart law enforcement and, in the process, they also break the law themselves. The organizers of this gun trafficking ring are all convicted felons. They would not have been able to buy weapons legally.”

Assistant United States Attorney Fernando Groene is prosecuting the case for the U.S. Attorney's Office.

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